

STANDARDS AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
29 JUNE 2017

(7.15 pm - 8.15 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Peter McCabe (in the Chair),
Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Adam Bush,
Councillor John Dehaney, Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes,
Councillor Ian Munn, Councillor David Williams,
Councillor John Bowcott and Councillor Mary Curtin

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Janice Howard and Councillor Martin Whelton. Councillors Oonagh Moulton and Sally Kenny attended as their respective substitutes.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Greg Udeh, Independent Person Derek Prior and apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Agatha Akyigyina.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meetings are agreed as a correct record.

4 DRAFT ACCOUNTS (Agenda Item 4)

Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services presented the report, advising that timescales had been missed due to the introduction of the new financial system in February 2017, however there should be a faster close down next year. It was noted that there was an overspend of £5.4 million against a forecast of £6.4million.

Councillor David Williams raised concern regarding the overspend and The Director Corporate Services advised that there were a number of increases particularly in relation to care packages which were not anticipated as well as increasing numbers in homecare.

Councillor Peter McCabe asked if this was unpredictable and whether this was an issue in other places. Suresh Patel, Ernst and Young advised that this was a national issue with other authorities experiencing similar increases and re-assured members that they were looking into how it was reported and dealt with, and would report back to Committee in September with their findings.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted and commented on the unaudited Statement of Accounts for the Council for the year ended 31st March 2017.

5 EXTERNAL AUDIT - FEE LETTERS FOR THE COUNCIL AND PENSION FUND ACCOUNTS (Agenda Item 5)

Suresh Patel, Ernst & Young presented the report, advising that the fees for 2017/18 were indicative and due to be signed off in July 2018. The Audit Appointments were in the final year of the contract, and had recently tendered for 2017/18 which Ernst and Young had been successful in retaining, with consultation on 2018/19 to take place shortly.

Mr Patel advised the Committee that the indicative summary fee for Certification of Housing benefit subsidy claim was not yet calculated, but expected to be similar to the previous year.

6 FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH (Agenda Item 6)

Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services presented the report. A working group had been established in March 2017 and had discussed a number of nominations, bringing forward two recommendations to Committee.

Councillor David Williams spoke on the reasons for the nominations as detailed in the report.

Councillor Peter McCabe thanked the working group for their hard work.

RESOLVED: That the Standards and General Purposes Committee recommended to Council that the award of Freedom of the Borough be made posthumously to the late Reverend Andrew Wakefield in recognition of the substantial contribution he made to the borough.

RESOLVED: That the Standards and General Purposes Committee recommended to Council that it records its thanks and presents a certificate to the 210 squadron to congratulate it on its 50th anniversary and recognises the Squadron's long service to the borough.

7 COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7)

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that since the last meeting he had received one complaint, which would be considered by the Independent Person shortly, and this would be reported back if it needed to be considered by the Standards Committee.

8 TEMPORARY AND CONTRACT STAFF UPDATE (Agenda Item 8)

Simon Williams, Director of Community and Housing presented the report, which covered January to March 2017.

The Director of Community and Housing noted that there had been a 10% reduction in the use of agency staff and progress had been made on recruiting staff from a temporary to permanent basis, as well as spending time on ensuring compliance with IR35 legislation.

The Director of Community and Housing advised the Committee that there were a number of major projects that were nearing completion which would reduce the number of agency staff, as well as a recent decrease in the Environment and Regeneration Directorate due to the TUPE transfer of staff as part of the recent outsourcing of services.

Kim Brown, HR Lead assured the Committee that this was an area taken seriously by all officers.

Chair Councillor Peter McCabe thanked Simon Williams for his outstanding contribution to the London Borough of Merton during his time at the authority.

RESOLVED: That members noted the progress made to monitor and control the use of temporary workers and consultants.

9 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 16/17 (Agenda Item 9)

Paul Evans, Assistant Director Corporate Governance presented the report outlining the new Framework and improvement actions proposed as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agreed the Annual Governance Statement.

10 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 10)

Caroline Holland, Director Corporate Services presented the report.

Members raised concern over a couple of areas which had not yet been done, accounts payable and pension investments.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that 2017/18 and controls around that had been looked at, and that where areas of concern had been raised, there were plans in place to do more to improve.

RESOLVED: That the Standards and General Purposes Committee reviewed and commented on the Internal Annual Report 2016/17.

11 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 11)

Councillor David Williams asked if there were any plans to update the Constitution.

The Monitoring Officer advised that aside from updates which were brought forward when required, there was no intention to full review it at present, however he would be happy to do so should members request it.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that the Review of Polling Places would be brought to the Committee in September.

The work programme was agreed.